Report of the Accreditation Visiting Team

SunHawk Academy 948 North 1300 West St. George, Utah 84770

April 21, 2005





Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

SunHawk Academy 948 North 1300 West St. George, Utah 84770

April 21, 2005

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 21, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of SunHawk Academy is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Brent Arnold is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at SunHawk Academy, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at SunHawk Academy.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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SUNHAWK ACADEMY

AMINISTRATION AND STAFF

| Robin Stephens Ben Harris | Principal Regional Director Executive Director Resource Specialist, Academic Director | |
|---|---|--|
| <u>Faculty</u> | | |
| Timothy Grogan Rex McCall Andrew Skaggs Mariana Taylor Jane Hardiman Adam Matthews | Resource Specialist, Academic Director, Lang Arts GT (Leaving April 21, 2005) Science Mathematics Social Studies Language Arts 9-12 Fine Arts Physical Education Physical Education, Health | |
| Support Staff | | |
| | Hall Support Staff Hall Support Staff | |

SUNHAWK ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

SunHawk Academy will provide an improvement oriented environment where students develop the desire and skills to make intelligent life choices, problem solve, communicate effectively and think critically becoming life long learners and productive citizens in the community.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Each student is a valuable individual with unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs.
- Students learn by doing.
- Students' self-concept is a direct reflection of achievement.
- Effective communication is essential to life long learning.
- Life long learning is essential to life long success.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Consultant in School Accreditation, Visiting Team Chairperson

Judith H. Vander Heide, Consultant in School Accreditation

VISITING TEAM REPORT

SUNHAWK ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

SunHawk Academy of Utah is licensed as a residential treatment center (RTC) for adolescents in crisis. SunHawk first opened its doors in 1995. It started with five residential students located in one host home. Since that time, the school has grown to become a self-contained facility with an average of 72 residential students and over 135 employees.

The academy is located in St. George, Utah, in the farthest southwestern part of the state. St. George is a small city with a population of approximately 75,000; it is the urban center of Washington County. The population of the county is approximately 120,000 and is continually growing. Known for its scenic beauty, St. George is the staging point for visits and tours of the many national parks and forests such as Zion, Bryce, Fish Lake, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

The school admits students year round with a minimum stay of 90 days, though most students average a stay of 6 months. The length of stay is open-ended in order to allow therapists, teachers, residential counsels, parents, and students to decide when a student has reached an appropriate stage to assure a better chance of success upon transition home.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The school discovered significant findings about each student, since each is carefully profiled in order to individualize instruction to the extent possible, and to help students with their psychological and behavioral issues. The Visiting Team notes that SunHawk adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school, with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational and rehabilitative direction for each student.

The school's analysis of the profile includes the identification of its strengths and limitations, and for the most part it provides a description of the "big picture" about the performance of the school. Profile information was used in drafting the school's improvement plan.

The Visiting Team notes that in preparing the profile the school followed the guidelines of the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and the NSSE handbook, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance*, as well as the Utah accreditation handbook, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team commends the profile information that is given, but nevertheless recommends that in future self-studies, more information on teachers be listed, such as years employed in teaching, degrees, etc. More information on testing results and indicators of progress would be helpful, and is normally part of a self-study.

The school is reminded to put its best foot forward and to profile thoroughly.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The faculty and staff at SunHawk Academy believe parents are an integral part of the program and an essential element of the therapeutic process. When students arrive, a therapist, an academic advisor, and a substance abuse counselor (if applicable) are assigned to work with that child and his or her parents. Weekly step meetings and phone sessions with parents, as well as academic classes and three to five therapeutic groups a week, comprise a typical schedule. Therapists will incorporate into the treatment plan information pertinent to the treatment of each student relating to past inappropriate behaviors.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

This has been described in Chapter 1 above.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

SunHawk Academy's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

- Responsible Citizens
- Effective Communicators
- Resourceful Learners

Indicators of Student Achievement for each of the above DRSLs are as follows:

Responsible Citizens

- Students will understand the importance of and demonstrate personal responsibility and integrity.
- Students will understand their actions affect not only themselves, but also others that include family, community, the nation and the world.
- Students will be committed to healthy relationships in all aspects of their lives.

Effective Communicators

- Students will understand effective communication is an important skill, which will lead to personal success regardless of career or vocation choice.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to appropriately advocate for personal needs, show empathy and actively listen.
- Students will effectively express themselves through written and spoken communication

Resourceful Learners

• Students will understand personal learning strengths and weakness, how said strengths and weakness affect lives and be able to use a variety of resources to engage in meaningful learning.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?
 - SunHawk is to be commended for its collaborative effort. Focus groups were established and committee members met regularly as part of the self-study process. Beliefs, mission, and DRSLs were a result of the collaborative approach. The mission statement describes a compelling purpose and direction for the school.
- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?
 - This has been well accomplished (see the list of beliefs at the beginning of this report). The school beliefs address key issues pertinent to effective decision making and policy development. It appears that the implications of the school's belief statements and the level of the school's commitment to acting upon the beliefs have been considered prior to finalizing the list of beliefs.
- c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

They align as recommended by NSSE. The Visiting Team observed that the analysis of student learning needs takes into account the profile data and related assessment and evaluation measures of student learning. The expectations for student learning reflect meaningful and appropriately challenging goals. They are free of jargon, and all stakeholders can understand the clear and concise language.

Curriculum Development:

- a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?
 - The curriculum is based on the Utah Core, and teachers work together to meet and modify the core as needed for the school's unique population. The Utah Life Skills are a part of the curriculum. Standards for appropriate learning for the students' varying abilities guide the development of curriculum.
- b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

See above. All faculty members concur in focusing on the school-wide DRSLs as part of their teaching assignment.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?
 - Teachers have learned that they must be creative and innovative with this student population, and that they must help with the rehabilitation of students as well as their academic needs. Teachers are very much aware that instructional time must be protected and appropriately allocated to support learning. The Visiting Team encourages the teaching staff to continue and to improve this endeavor.
- b) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?
 - The students engage in several appropriate "additional opportunities," such as sports and community service, as well as activities that directly support the curriculum. The school provides opportunities for students to improve and enrich their learning through expanded use of time, facilities, and instructional resources.

Quality Assessment Systems:

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

The development of assessments of student learning is based on a clear definition of the type of achievement to be assessed and the performance standards for evaluating the quality of students' achievement. Assessment is both formative and summative. It appeared to the Visiting Team that assessments are fair and equitable. Teachers attempt to individualize assessment.

Leadership for School Improvement:

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The "consulting principal" is a competent educational leader who understands the importance of promoting and fostering quality instruction. Although he does not visit the school every day, he makes regularly scheduled appearances and is frequently in telephone contact with the faculty and other administrators.

He encourages decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and individualized. He, along with other administrators (see that list at the front of this report), provides skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. He constantly monitors the work of the teachers and checks on the progress of the students.

The school leadership promotes quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning.

Community Building:

- a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?
 - As noted throughout this report, community building is part of the ethos of SunHawk. Positive and productive working relationships are established among students, teachers, support staff, and administrators.
- b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

The school participates in community projects and service learning, which is an integral part of the program.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

This is done as need is perceived and funds allow.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The school is committed to progressive change. Of course, a principle concern is to help these youngsters with their personnel problems in order that they may better achieve academically.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Standard I – Educational Program

SunHawk meets all four sections of this standard. The educational program is aligned with the mission statement and beliefs. The Visiting Team observed that the vision for the school has been collaboratively developed. The instructional and organizational practices, as well as the policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society. The program of studies meets the requirements of the state.

Standard II – Student Personnel Services

All three sections of this standard are met. Personnel services are designed to give appropriate, systematic assistance to students as called for in the subsections of the requirements. The assigned personnel for guidance includes a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled. The primary objective of the counseling program is to promote and enhance the academic and personal development of students and to prepare them for post-high school experiences.

Standard III – School Plant and Equipment

This standard is met. The school plant provides for a variety of instructional activities and programs and incorporates aesthetic features that contribute to a positive educational atmosphere. It provides for the health and safety of students and all school faculty and personnel.

Standard IV - Library Media Program

The school meets the five sections of this standard. The school library media program is a primary resource for literacy, information, and curriculum support. It contributes to the achievement of the DRSLs. A certified library media teacher (a part-time consultant—very experienced) provides instruction, resources, and activities to promote independent use of ideas and information. Sufficient funds are provided each year to meet the library/media needs of students and teachers.

Standard V - Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)

The five sections of this standard are met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school. Systematic analysis of data regarding the performance of students has been incorporated into the comprehensive school improvement process, as has ongoing examination of instructional practices. The plan is updated and adjusted each year in alignment with perceived needs.

Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is met. All professional personnel are in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah, and are endorsed or properly, temporarily exempted for the subjects they are teaching.

Standard VIII - Administration

This standard is met. The administration of SunHawk provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary and required administrative procedures.

Standard IX - Teacher Load

This standard is met. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or NAAS.

Standard X – Activities

This standard is met. The school supports a range of activities that supplement and augment the basic instructional program by providing additional enriching experiences for students consistent with the school's mission and beliefs. Attention is paid to providing equal opportunities.

Standard XI – Business Practices

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

It appears to be adequate and understood by all stakeholders. There is school-wide commitment to the action plan, and follow-up procedures are sound. The Visiting Team assumes that the plan will achieve the desired outcomes. School personnel intend to change and modify it as needed. Future action plans, however, should indicate the person(s) responsible for overseeing different sections of the plan (who does what, when, and why, materials and funds needed, etc.). Also, the way in which the action plan directly aligns with the DRSLs should be better clarified. The NSSE handbook should be consulted as a model for formatting and for an excellent explanation of "alignment."

Perhaps the school could write two action plans, one directly treating the DRSLs and another that deals with other pertinent issues. The recommended format is to have complete alignment (profiling—establishing beliefs—mission statement derived from beliefs—analysis of how the school is operating—establishment of DRSLs based on profiling, mission, and beliefs—an action plan that addresses the DRSLs).

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends all personnel and students for their hospitality and cooperation with the Visiting Team.
- The Visiting Team commends all personnel for their honesty concerning the academic programs at SunHawk and for their willingness to improve.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for their enthusiasm and apparent devotion to improving the lives of the students (i.e., for their commitment to the mission statement and beliefs).
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, therapists, and faculty for holding regular meetings to discuss all aspects of the ongoing program of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for their efforts to design IEPs for the students.
- The Visiting Team commends school personnel for providing opportunities in service learning.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for fostering a nurturing yet goal-directed atmosphere.
- The Visiting Team commends teachers for the examples of competent teaching that the Visiting Team observed.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration for creating the "parent check-in site" on the Internet.
- The Visiting Team commends the administrators and teachers for establishing a "best practices" committee.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for working with the "Twelve Step Recovery" program.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration for supporting quality in-service for teachers

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school profile in future self-studies offer even more information and data, including follow-up studies on students who have completed their stay at SunHawk.
- The Visiting Team recommends that all personnel continue to work as a team on all aspects of the program.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school's owners and administration continue to make great efforts to involve parents in school improvement. (The Visiting Team recognizes that this is difficult.)
- The Visiting Team recommends that the staff eliminate from future self-studies
 much of the material that does not pertain to the six divisions of the study (mission,
 beliefs, etc.). Reference is made here to items such as the detailed school policies.
 Such information should be made available to the Visiting Team at the time of the
 visit, however.
- The Visiting Team recommends that school personnel in future self-studies better align the action plan directly with the school's DRSLs (using language and descriptions that make this alignment clearer).
- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration (with input from the faculty) consider offering students better opportunities to prepare for standardized tests.

Lastly, the school is reminded that accreditation provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the school. A primary purpose of accreditation is to protect the public trust. Accreditation promotes voluntary self-regulation. It is a means of showing confidence in a school's performance (i.e., showing that both quantitative and qualitative standards have been established). An ultimate objective of the self-study and accreditation process should be that schools institutionalize the process of reflective inquiry and thereby become internally responsible for the maintenance of standards—even the creation of standards. The Visiting Team anticipates that SunHawk will continue the process of self-evaluation and ongoing improvement.